

## **INDIANA'S 2001 MAPLE PRODUCTION**

Shortly after the close of the 2001 Maple Syrup season, 176 questionnaires were sent to all known producers of maple syrup in Indiana. 89 individuals promptly responded to the questionnaire resulting in a 51% response rate.

For the sake of comparison of similar climatic regions, the results were broken down per two major regions. The dividing line chosen was U.S. Route 40 bisecting the State into a Northern region and a Southern region.

Of the of the producers that responded to the questionnaire, over 78% of these folks produced syrup in 2001, 13 in the southern region and 54 in the northern region.

Over a quarter of the states' total syrup production of 8763.5 gallons was accounted for by the four largest producers. Northern producers accounted for 7537.5 gallons while southern producers generated 1226 gallons.

There are fifty-two counties in the state that have at least one active maple syrup producer. Washington County is home to our State's largest producer. Elkhart County recorded the most producers with 11 sugar camps.

The average opening dates were 2/17/01 and 2/16/01 for the north and south respectfully. The average closing dates were 3/19/01 and 3/18/01 for the north and south respectfully. The overall state average for the opening date was 2/16/01 and the closing date was 3/18/01. Those using tubing tended to catch earlier runs and ran later into the season, versus those using buckets. Apparently concern of open bucketed tap holes drying prematurely accounted for the tubing operator's longer seasons.

The average amount of sugar water (sap) needed to produce a gallon of syrup was 44.3 gallons in the north and 44.8 gallons in the south. The state average was 44.5 gallons of sap to produce a gallon of syrup. The average amount of sap needed in 2001 to produce a gallon of syrup may not be wholly accurate, as quite a few producers did not keep accurate records of sap inflow. The average amount of syrup produced per camp was 98.5 gallons, a considerable increase from the 43.9 gallons reported in 2000. Most sugar water was produced at the producer's own sugar bush(es), although a state total of almost 32,000 gallons of sugar water was purchased from outside producers.

A total over 36,000 taps were utilized in 2001, an average of 412 taps per producer. Of those 36,000 taps, almost seventy-four percent of the state's syrup production was accounted for via producers using buckets for sugar water collection. Almost 17,000 buckets were used in 2001 for collection purposes. The amount of sugar water collected by buckets accounted for total syrup production of 6203 gallons in the north and 209.5 gallons in the south region. Fifty-one Indiana maple syrup producers used an average of 333 buckets in their collection operations. Buckets remain more popular in the north region. The largest single producers utilizing buckets

hung 2050 buckets in the northern region and 110 buckets in the southern half. Several producers reported using plastic bags and tubing in addition to buckets for the collection of sugar water.

Although plastic sap collection bags have decreased somewhat in popularity since their introduction, sixteen producers used 1955 collection bags. The average producer using bags tends to be a relatively smaller operation with approximately 122 taps set. Exceptions are present though with one individual using over 670 bags for collection. Sap bag collection accounted about 10% of the total syrup production. On a regional basis, those using plastic sap collection bags were split pretty evenly between the north and the south. Ten northern producers using bag collection produced 845 gallons of syrup, six southern producers using bags produced only 105 gallons of syrup in 2001.

A number of producers are trying tubing for sugar water collection and are slowly changing over as terrain, dollars and results allow. Statewide, 15 persons used over 12,000' of tubing for collection purposes in 2001. Those using tubing produced 2,413 gallons of syrup, which amounts to slightly over 160 gallons per producer. Popularity of tubing is slightly greater in the south where sloping topography lends itself well to tubing collection with or without vacuum pumps.

The statewide average price received for a retail gallon of syrup was \$29.11. The average gallon price was slightly higher in the south region at \$29.62, versus the north average of \$29.11 per retail gallon. The average statewide price received for a quart of retail syrup was \$9.80. Statewide wholesale average gallon price was \$23.90; there was little variation in wholesale gallon prices per region.

The statistics gathered via our 2001 maple syrup production questionnaire might not reflect the true income generated from Indiana's producers. The statewide reported syrup income for 2001 (multiplying the average \$/per gallon X reported production) is slightly over \$255,000. However, if one appreciates that which was consumed via the producers' family, given away, or simply not reported, the calculated dollar figure very conservatively grows to about \$300,000. Assuming this figure to be realistic, the average dollar return per tap hole is \$8.18 which is almost \$2 more than reported in the 2000 maple syrup producers survey. Sales do not appear to be a limiting factor for Indiana maple product producers; rather the inability to produce enough syrup is the greatest impediment to finding our maple fortunes.

Overall, greater than 90% of the produced syrup is sold at a retail level. Of those reporting sales, over 22% state that a bulk of their production is given away or consumed domestically; of course these same producers tend to be smaller in scope and production. Packaging preferences show the majority favoring retail sales in gallon containers, fewer favoring quarts, with remainders sold in smaller units. A few producers offer maple sugar, creams, candies, cookies, etc., but apparently these maple products do not account for substantial percentages of any one producer's sales.

We are all aware that each sugar bush has unique characteristics and that no two bushes produce alike. Although Indiana is a relatively small geographic area, the variation in weather is significant as evidenced by prior years. For the most part, respondents stated this year was an average to above average season. One of the more common comments was the “consistent freezing and thawing patterns”. For example, data from the last maple syrup production survey (2000) indicated total volume of almost 3,648 gallons produced; nearly 42% less than produced this year.

Fifty-four respondents stated they would like to be listed in a new Indiana Maple Syrup Producers Brochure. As time and funds permit, we will prepare a new brochure. Additionally, we believe it would be beneficial to have "Indiana generic" maple syrup articles on hand for the barrage of requests from reporters for local newspapers and other media come next February, 2002.

I sincerely thank all the maple producers for their prompt questionnaire responses. I have updated our maple database and will continue to be a contact for Indiana maple products. Although my time is limited for personal visits to your operation, I do welcome your calls and inquiries on all facets of maple production. Special forest products such as maple syrup contribute substantially to many rural folk's income while offering wholesome therapy at the same time.